One-State is introduced to the implied reader through a newspaper article. This article tells them of the glory of One-State, the glory of its Benefactor. In fact, the One-State even believes its existence is logical and that it has “mathematically infallible happiness” (Zamyatin, p. 3). The way the reader is shown this One-State immediately gives the idea of communism, of total control. The One-State even asserts that should the unknown creatures on alien planets not understand this happiness, “it will be our duty to force them to be happy” (Zamyatin, p. 3). The implied audience is supposed to feel that this One-State is a perfect utopia, but the actual reader is immediately guided, almost forced, to understand that this One-State is not a utopia. It is instead a state of totalitarianism, one that is ruled by the almighty Benefactor.

It might be quickly assumed that if the One-State represents totalitarianism over a group of people, then the MEPHI represents freedom. The issue with this assessment, is the reader only truly feels this way because they are “implicated in making a satiric judgement on folly without that judgment ever being made manifest in the text” (Csicsery-Ronay, p. 241). The narrator, D-503, however, is unreliable. He is constantly unsure of what to think, and switches his thoughts constantly. He immediately casts doubt when he refuses to go to the Bureau of Guardians. This action should have been easily accomplished by someone who has complete faith in the One-State. The reader is then led to use this doubt to fill in the areas that are left out with their own experiences. “The reader is the seduced into co-operating with the story, just as D-503 is seduced into co-operating with the MEPHI” (Csicsery-Ronay, p. 241)

The existence of One-State is justified to the reader simply because it exists. D-503 uses the analogy of man once having a tail. “But can you imagine yourself now with a tail…I cannot picture a city without the dressing of the Green Wall, I cannot picture a life not expressed in the numerical overlay of the Table”( (Zamyatin, p. 12). D-503 presents the idea of a perfect life with an illogical explanation. Based on his reasoning, if the One-State were to fail, and the walls were to come down, he would initially mourn the passing of One-State, much like man mourned the losing of his tail. However, he would come to appreciate whatever new life lay ahead of him. In the end, he would look back and consider it absurd to live under the rule of One-State.

As the story progresses, D-503 becomes more distant from the One-State, and I-330 turns him from someone who thinks happiness is control, to someone willing to steal the Intrepid for the rebel cause. The MEPHI is intended to represent the desire for freedom, for good. The issue in this, is the MEPHI, and I-330, treats D-503 in the same way that the One-State treats him. The reader knows, from the way D-503 reacts to I-330’s leaving that he is enamored with her. When she tests him and says she will leave forever, he responds “I can’t go on without you, I can’t. I must not be without you” to which she simply responds “Yes, I know” (Zamyatin, pp. 162-163). The reader never knows how I-330 feels about D-503. While the reader should embrace the rebellion of the MEPHI, both the One-State and the MEPHI are formally equal. “The immediate success of the MEPHI rebellion depends on the success I-330 has in dominating D-503; and the suppression of the rebelling appears to depend on the Benefactor’s ability to do the same thing” (Csicsery-Ronay, p. 242). Much like I-330 never lets D-503 get too far, the Benefactor never subjects D-503 to the machine, as they both depend on him.

This behavior shows the irony of the title of the novel. Even as D-503 attempts to work with the MEPHI, he is still not independent of his own thoughts, “for D-503 can never be an “I”. His identity is a function either of the State, or of I-330. He is always “We”” (Csicsery-Ronay, p. 242). D-503 receives equal treatment from the MEPHI as he does the One-State. He is given the ability to leave I-330, and the Benefactor gives him the ability to live. In the end, it could be assumed that he had a choice in whom he decided to help.

There is no doubt behind the idea that the One-State is a symbol of the Panopticon; a prison in which all cells are visible at any time. With One-States translucent walls, schedule of events to always be at, and the reading of mail, it is obvious that One-State is a state of almost constant surveillance. Only occasionally and through cleverly devised secret passageways are the MEPHI and D-503 able to avoid detection, but temporarily. Punishment in the One-State works much like that of the Jeremy Bentham’s idea of punishment. “Bentham’s main concern here is in achieving the greatest apparent suffering with the least real suffering, that is, achieving the greatest effect of the punishment on others with the least inflicted pain” (Bozovic, p. 5). This same method is employed by the Benefactor. When the One-State has problems with its people, which rarely happens “they are easily repaired, without having to stop the perpetual great progress of the whole machine. And to expel the offending cog, we have the skillful, severe hand of the Benefactor” (Zamyatin, p. 14). The suffering of the one is used to inflict the fear in others to do the right thing.

The Panopticon, however, does not have to be a physical place. The main aspect of the Panopticon, is control and so it does not have to be simply for prisoners. In Jeremy Bentham’s letters, he describes the many uses for the Panopticon through letters 18 to 21. These uses include manufactories, mad-houses, hospitals, and schools. According to Foucault, all that is needed to do is place a supervisor in the central tower and shut in each person, be them a madman, patient, or schoolboy (Foucault, p. 200). This then leads to the effect of the Panopticon; “to induce the inmate a state of conscious and permanent visibility that assures the automatic functioning of power” (Foucault, p. 201). In Bentham’s design, the supervisor could never be seen, and as such, the observee would not know if he was being watched. In fact, no supervisor could be placed in the central tower, and the same effect would still happen. This shows that the Panopticon does not have to be a physical place, but instead a frame of mind. If one believes they are potentially being watched, while it might not completely dissuade people from committing crimes, passing diseases, or cheating, it will certainly cause people to have caution. In a way, the Panopticon is a conscience.

In One-State, each individual believes that he or she is contributing to the greater good of the State. Each person has a role, be those ciphers, teachers, or guardians. The people do not believe in the term “I” or “You”, but instead use “We”, and even consider the term to be offensive. When addressed as “you”, D-503 has this feeling: “She used an ancient, long-forgotten pronunciation of “You,” the “You” of the owner to the slave, and it entered my sharply, slowly” (Zamyatin, p. 64). D-503 believes that by being a We, he is cooperating, however, he is merely being obedient. This mistake is often made; from childhood, children are taught to be obedient, to follow instructions and believe lies, and not to question it. The issue with this, according to Claude Steiner is “after many years of obedience training, we become adults and we’re expected to suddenly think for ourselves…Unfortunately, for many of us, that is very difficult, given our childhood training” (Steiner, p. 51). He goes on to say that while we are told as adults to not believe deception, and refuse to be told how to think, we are also told to believe people of authority, such as scientists, politicians, and police.

The choice presented to D-503 is very black and white. He can either choose freedom, the MEPHI, the overly apparent good in the novel, or he can choose structure and control, the One-State, the clear evil. D-503’s understanding of freedom is of an “unorganized, savage state” (Zamyatin, p. 13). This is written in the books, and taught from birth. The alternative is the One-State, all powerful, working in perfect unison to achieve a common goal. When presented with these choices, freedom can sound dangerous, and not worth it. In the end, D-503 chooses control and security, at the expense of the potential to live a life in the way he wants.

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